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Empowering Rural Participation and Partnerships in Morocco's Sustainable Development

Yossef Ben-Meir

Abstract

This essay explores the vast potential for participatory and sustainable human development in Morocco. Though Morocco is a country with many diverse resources, it remains burdened by severe levels of poverty and illiteracy, and now growing social discord. There have recently been increased public calls for participatory development programs designed and implemented by and for local people. The essay identifies six existing Moroccan Frameworks intended to initiate decentralized human development programs, and critically examines their efficacy. Ultimately, the purpose of the article is to suggest a new model to implement these Frameworks with maximum impact. The six Frameworks deal with municipal development plans, a sub-national funding agency, decentralization, environmental protection and agriculture, women's rights, and youth engagement. Each of these Frameworks present positive ideals which are not fully being capitalized on currently because they lack sufficient resources and momentum individually. By integrating the six Frameworks to function in tandem, Morocco could achieve its goal of initiating widespread decentralized, sustainable development programs that truly impact local communities in positive ways.

Introduction

This article provides an overview and analysis of Morocco's national policy initiatives as related to critical issues of local development. In recent years, while Morocco has put in place the right frameworks for mobilizing rural communities to advance the nation's sustainable development goals, it falls woefully short when it comes to implementation. What is sorely needed is an action plan for implementation that provides community training and evaluation processes for assessing progress. As someone who has been engaged in rural development in Morocco for the past 26 years, this policy analysis assesses Morocco's sustainable development goals highlighting the different frameworks that exist, an analysis of how these frameworks can work together and complement each other, and

recommendations for how to engage and empower local communities to successfully interact with and implement them.

Since 2000, the author leads a Moroccan-U.S. civil organization that assists local communities in their identification and management of priority development projects—in the sectors of agriculture, education, health, and women’s and youth empowerment—and achieved initiatives located in the 12 regions of Morocco. The community-driven data gathering, assessments, consensus-building, and overall project experiences engaging with most ministries and administrative tiers have afforded the author realistic local and national contextual perspectives, which is drawn from in this essay, in combination with literature on these subjects.

The utilization in the essay of the terms participatory development, sustainable development, and human development is deliberate, as it is also in their embedding in Moroccan national policies. Participatory development refers to community beneficiaries of development being in control of all phases of the project cycle, from design to evaluation. The process of local people planning projects together and sharing information itself creates positive outcomes; however, the participatory approach or “method” (King Mohammed VI, 2008) as commonly referenced in Moroccan codifying documents) seeks the fulfillment of the participants initiatives and the measurable change they create (Green & Haines, 2002, p. 14), such as in regards to employment, clean water, and girls’ participation in education.

Sustainable development focuses on the characteristics that enable project outcomes to endure, which evaluations over the decades since World War II and from all parts of the world show people’s participation to be most causal.¹ After all, sustainable project designs incorporate the full range of factors that bear on matters of development, such as cultural, economic, environmental, financial, historic, political, and technical dimensions. Indeed, the more inclusive and participatory during the project development experience, the more the opportunity is given that the full range of factors or points of view will be injected into the project design and decision-making processes. This operational definition, which can also be found in Moroccan formative programs, such as the National Initiative for Human Development discussed below (Kingdom of Morocco, 2016), suggests that the concept of sustainable development has evolved to become more multifaceted since its coining in a United Nations report in 1987, when it heavily (or even exclusively (Holdgate, 1996) emphasized natural resource management as its determining factor.

Finally, human development, also based on pragmatic principles made functional and evaluative by the United Nations (HDRO Outreach, 2019), refers to

¹ A 1990 study of 52 USAID projects across different sectors showed a positive correlation between participation of beneficiaries and project success—almost as strong as between availability of funding and success (see Bhatnagar & Williams, 1992, p. 10). The World Bank’s evaluation of 121 rural water projects around the world showed that one of the strongest correlations with success was local participation and capabilities—and that it was more significant than technical solutions and capital expended (see Uphoff, Esman, & Krishna, 1998, p. 36). An analysis of five case studies of development projects in Thailand suggests that people’s participation is the most critical determinant in attaining sustainability (see Gonzalez, 1988, p. 42).

the conditional opportunities to create the change we seek in our lives. Its focus is on strengthening personal and group-related capacities (such as in participatory decision-making, project management, and supporting organizational growth) in order that effected communities analyze social and natural conditions and design and create projects that enhance their livelihoods, education, health, and empowerment. Morocco's goal is to utilize participatory approaches to achieve projects that are sustainable and that measurably enhance the standard of living, knowledge, longevity, and engagement in society.

Morocco is a nation of immense promise in terms of its human development potential (The World Bank, 2019). The country's naturally bountiful landscape, if combined with dynamic social development frameworks, could transform Morocco into a bottom-up haven of community-managed projects and facilitate change in Africa and the Islamic World. On the other hand, should Morocco not sufficiently achieve publicly acceptable levels of development, which is currently the case particularly in rural areas and with marginalized groups, other nations in the region may feel deterred from committing itself as Morocco has done to charters of decentralization, women's freedoms, and participatory community action, for example. In other words, Morocco's successful local people's development movements are for the profound benefit of its own sustainable future, and due to its geographic and historic position it is also for the sake of serving as a guiding model well beyond its borders.

An Action Plan to Implement Morocco's Frameworks for Sustainable Development

The following six national policy and programmatic frameworks form the pillars of people's development in Morocco. The questions this article addresses are: how can the six frameworks better fulfill their individual purposes? And, how can the frameworks work or relate with each other to create sustainable and participatory human development that is managed by the local community beneficiaries, with the support of decentralized administrations and partnerships?

These frameworks, which are established national policies and laws that cover the entire country, aim to initiate human development that is participatory, decentralized, and sustainable. People-driven initiatives that the frameworks could enable are, for example, programs through which women define and achieve what they want within communities, while learning laws that advance and protect their status in the family and society. The frameworks could help youth overcome the risks of an exceedingly difficult life, such as their condition of being more likely to be unemployed the more they are educated (USAID, 2018a). The Moroccan development approach also provides a basis for innovative (and organic) agriculture to grow while aiding rural civil associations to plan and create new projects that meet local needs.

It is not the insufficiency of the principles and guidelines of these frameworks that accounts for the hardships that afflict the Moroccan people, especially those in rural areas. There is generally inadequate coordination among ministries to achieve the synergies of these national initiatives, and a lack of popular understanding and

the needed skills in order to translate them into reality. Central to fulfilling this development model is the transfer of knowledge focused on how to organize community meetings where people together determine the projects they seriously need and build the multi-sectoral and multi-tiered partnerships to achieve implementation.

The six government-constructed Moroccan frameworks that set out to guide community and national growth are:

- 1) The Municipal Charter, amended in 2010, requires the creation of multi-year community development plans that are formed by people's participation (Secretary General of the Government, 2019);
- 2) The National Initiative for Human Development, which was launched in 2005 to provide access to sub nationally-managed funding for multidimensional development projects in rural and urban communities (INDH, 2019);
- 3) The Decentralization Roadmap, first unveiled in 2008, and the Charter ratified in 2018, synthesize three pathways to empower regions, provinces, and municipalities in development and self-determination: delegation, de-concentration, and devolution (Ministry of Interior, 2019);
- 4) The Green Morocco Plan, written in 2008, recognizes that essential financial grants and technical contributions are needed along the entire agricultural value-chain—from nurseries to processing—to overcome the systemic poverty that afflicts most rural households (Maroc Vert, 2019);
- 5) Morocco's Family Code, or *Moudawana* based on the Maliki School of Sunni Islam, was reformed in 2004 to promote equality and joint responsibility between men and women (United Nations, 2004); and
- 6) Youth leadership programs created by the ministries of National Education and Vocational Training; Higher Education and Scientific Research; among others, to increase youth employment and involve young people in decision-making in civil society and the public sphere (The World Bank Group, 2019).

There are other important and forward-thinking national developmental approaches. Stated briefly, these additional frameworks include: a) Morocco's commitment to the Maghreb Union bloc and African unity, with regionalism representing a transitional phase to global competitiveness (Soludo, 2003, p. 273) and a strategy to deal with regional challenges, such as pollution and illegal immigration (Duina, 2006, p. 20); b) the formalization of laws and reforms in 2002 and 2018, respectively, to promote the growth of civil organizations and cooperatives; c) renewable energy actions (which, however, should be realigned to be more household-driven) (Hanger-Kopp, Komendatova, & Zejli, 2016); d) culture

preservation while incorporating human development benefits, such as the example of Moroccan Muslim-Jewish collaboration for building organic fruit tree nurseries for family farmers and schools (Ben-Meir, 2018); and e) a multidimensional trade strategy that attempts to balance global free trade with protections from hegemonic powers enabled by integrated regional markets and rewarding domestic markets (Delener, 1999, p. 1). Nonetheless, the six frameworks listed above lay out exemplary guidelines and potential community empowerment basis, according to this author, that are critically needed for these and other national programs and policies to be implemented productively, inclusively, and equitably.

Sadly, essential human development outcomes are not being realized in Morocco as hoped and needed. I have found after observation and engagement with Moroccan development from positions in civil society, government, and academia that there is an abysmal pace of rural sustainable development. There are few examples in which government agencies and officials have successfully applied participatory development methods, even though these methods are codified in national charters and policies. This is largely not the fault of the personnel and officials, but the result of their lack of training to facilitate inclusive community planning.

The participatory approach has developed and expanded to comprise hundreds of “families” or methods of carrying out group dialogue on community needs and data-gathering to identify and meet project development goals (Kumar, 2002, p. 16). To enable an inclusive planning process to take place the approach applies visual—and therefore generally accessible—diagramming and planning centered around projects addressing high-priority goals (Lyons, Smuts, & Stephens, 1999, p. 10). Typical methods of analysis include mapping, where local communities analyze household wellbeing, risks, and community assets and gaps. Using visually-based methodology, community members improve their ability to determine and evaluate solutions to problems, create and present action plans, link available funds with priorities, manage projects, and advocate successful local initiatives for greater scale.

There is a severe lack of development progress in rural areas, where 75% of all impoverished Moroccan people reside; they experience close to five times the national poverty rate (Noury, 2007). The social discontent from chronic poverty has boiled over into disruption and localized demonstrations, mostly in the north. Considering the overall ineffectiveness of Moroccan development programs—no matter how progressive their founding visions—there is reason to be seriously concerned that growing civic dissatisfaction will continue to outpace the rate of fulfillment.

The urban-rural stratification remains alarming and is growing in Morocco (The World Bank and the Morocco High Commission for Planning, 2017), even as both groups generally experience economic hardship. Rural communities have great agricultural and human development possibilities in regards to the range of potential organic and endemic food product, niche artisanal crafts, and available markets; yet in recent years, there has been a 15% rise in households that consider themselves poor (The World Bank and the Morocco High Commission for Planning, 2017).

They lack basic essential human development projects such as water for irrigation and clean drinking water; rural women's and children's education; completing the agricultural value-chain, from tree and plant nurseries to processing and commercialization of product; and people's empowerment to implement their own initiatives.

The problem is that Morocco's programs for national growth and development through people's participation are not being orchestrated in tandem. As will be explained, and as recently acknowledged by the Moroccan government (Purgeon, 2018), integrating these programs would enable their mutual reinforcement to promote accelerated growth and success of development initiatives. In response to the public calls by King Mohammed VI that the nation reconsider its development model, this essay takes the position and explains with case evidence that it is the *implementation* process of the nation's development model that requires the major reevaluation and overhaul, not the guiding principles or vision of the model itself (Koundouno, 2018).

This article recommends a new action plan to advance Morocco's sustainable development—emphasizing disadvantaged people and regions and resting on participatory democratic methods and decentralization. The challenge that Morocco faces, however, to achieve its vision is seriously daunting, especially when we consider that even as there is supporting evidence of the efficacy of participation on a small scale, there is insufficient evidence around the globe of its effectiveness as a strategy for broad-based and long-term social change (Cleaver, 2001, p. 36). Thus, the successful unfolding of Morocco's bold development approach, guided by its frameworks, bears existential consequences for itself, its position on the larger African and Middle Eastern stage, and potential transfer to other nations of the world by exemplifying a decentralized participatory development course.

To Morocco's lasting credit, key laws, policies, and programs already exist—for instance, the Moroccan Constitution itself—to promote development projects that reflect locally shared priorities and have democratic decision-making and governing arrangements. The lack of rural development is predominantly due to the poor implementation of the existing frameworks, the continued pervasive poverty, and widespread gender biases—not lack of opportunities. Morocco has declared positions on sustainable development that could result in successful, scaled community movements, engaging and improving life within the society, but only if applied correctly.

As will be discussed in section six, the outstanding potential of Morocco's agricultural economy—with strategic local community investments in implementing farm-to-fork initiatives—is that it can become the financial engine to create projects in education, health, new businesses, and capacity-building in management and technical areas, to implement the change that local communities and their associations determine. The organization and process necessary to achieve sustainable, revenue-generating enterprises is supported by Moroccan laws, and prototypes of community initiatives have proven successful. Fortunately, social conditions and economic opportunities—coupled with a sense of necessity, if not urgency, to fulfill—are such that a significantly more accomplished Moroccan model could potentially be at hand in the not-too-distant future.

Morocco's Municipal Charter

The first framework, Morocco's Municipal Charter, requires locally elected representatives to create one-, three-, and five-year development plans derived from people's participation in the determination of local projects. This could be a major chance for sustainable development to take hold as people's participation and financing are the key factors of project sustainability (Chambers, 1993, pp. 11-13). However, in Morocco there is a constant challenge: elected members to municipal councils, who are given the responsibility to carry out the community plans, are typically not trained in facilitating participatory project methods. Representatives (and other community members) would highly benefit from applied learning workshops organized by government, civil society, universities, and socially responsible businesses to effectively fulfill the development-related articles of the Municipal Charter.

Catalyzing widespread and inclusive development projects means first implementing experiential training programs for university students, schoolteachers, technicians, civil society members, elected officials, and local people, for example, to be active agents of participatory development. Through hands-on training, the aforementioned municipal development plans can reflect the actual will of the people in regard to the projects and future they most want. The participatory community planning approach has been applied with success in a wide variety of situations. The projects cited below all successfully emerged from group assessments of their own needs. In rural areas, improvements have taken place in farming systems (Chambers 1993, p. 957), food production (Ruddell, 2002, p. 186), natural resource management (Campbell, 2001, p. 382), cooperatives (Sargent, 1986, p. 109), land use (Forester, 1989, p. 103), pest control management (Uphoff, Esman, & Krishna, 1998, p. 70), sanitation (Vernooy, Qui, & Xu, 2003, p. 99), and protected area management (Warford, 1989, p. 19). Similarly, in the field of business and public services, improvements have been noted in business management and production, infrastructural projects, poverty alleviation and economic development, technological developments including software, architectural planning, community control of policing and schools, the creation and delivery of services, and waste management (Ben-Meir, 2009, pp. 235-237).

With regard to health care, improvements are visible in terms of access and empowerment for the disabled (Jason, Suarez-Balcazar, Keys, Taylor, & Davis, , 2004, p. 4), disease control (health education) (De Koning & Martin, 1996, pp. 1-2), sexual and reproductive health (Kumar, 2002, p. 49), public health, and nutrition (Hampshire, Hills, & Iqbal, 2005, p. 340). In pedagogy, this methodology has been shown to assist formal and informal education (Jason et al., 2004, p. 4), experiential learning and communication (Campbell, 2001, p. 382), adult education (Kumar, 2002, p. 29) and—on college campuses—in increasing student involvement in academic decisions (Wengert, 1976, p. 27) university-community partnerships (Van der Eb et al., 2004, pp. 224-225), gender and youth development (Pancer & Krasnor, 2002, p. 62), and in overcoming racial prejudice and other forms of discrimination (Wengert, 1976, p. 27). Participatory planning methodology improves disaster management, including crisis situations such as war and drought

(Kumar, 2002, p. 49), as well as their amelioration and peace-building (Rodríguez, 2000, pp. 147-148), management of displaced people (Brand, 2001, p. 962), emergency relief in a conflict situation (Symes & Jasser, 2000, p. 149), and the work of welfare organizations (Thomas-Slayter, 1995, p. 9). Finally, it is cited as a crucial factor in improved organizational development (Kumar, 2002, p. 29); building civil society (Symes & Jasser, 2000, p. 149); human resources management (Taylor, 2001, p. 122); project and program evaluations (Campbell, 2001, p. 382); management practices (Cornwall & Pratt, 2003, p. 4); and policy development, reform, and advocacy (Kumar, 2002, p. 29).

Much of Morocco's development success depends upon dispersing skills to create and assist inclusive community planning meetings as well as implementing the projects that become designed by the people, who are the project beneficiaries and managers. The Municipal Charter—directing the administrative tier closest to the people—establishes an avenue for the success of participatory development. People-driven projects instituted in the Municipal Charter, are necessary for sustainable development and actualization of the other frameworks that compose the Moroccan model. Without local representatives understanding how to implement people's participation in development and without the local people aware of this vital right, plans are typically drafted in a top-down manner with impossible or unrealistic levels of uniformity. It has come to the point that the statutory requirement to create community plans through genuine participatory processes now often appears merely rhetorically. In my experiences over recent years, on multiple occasions governors have voiced concerns upon their reflection of the quality of the plans they receive; municipal council members discuss their desire to fulfill the participatory planning requirement while being without the information and material capacities to do so; and municipalities resorting to outside expertise to conduct the needed local assessments are able to access a limited number of people due to time and trust level constraints—discouraging the continued momentum that is needed to achieve project implementation and sustainability. Skills-building workshops in facilitating local consensus as well as gender- and youth-based dialogue to understand the different needs among the different demographic groups are absolutely critical if these dimensions of the Municipal Charter are to be effectively delivered.

I have met municipal council members in the Beni Mellal, Marrakech, Mohammedia, and Taroudant provinces who cite their Charter's statutes and state they are without instruction on how to procedurally accomplish development plans generated from the people. It would be helpful if actual participatory planning methods were included at the annex in the published Charter that all council members receive at the approximately 1,500 municipalities. Considering the lack of guidelines on how municipalities might proceed, it is not a surprise that I have also met governors of provinces who faced the impossible likelihood of receiving identical development plans from more than a dozen municipal councils. The plans contained the exact projects defined by hundreds of villages at the same precise level of priority, having been copied from one another. Effectively training council members and others in real community settings can be the primary remedy against

this awful loss of opportunity and result in plans for projects that accurately reflect the people's ideas.

The National Initiative for Human Development

The second framework, Morocco's National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD), is a national fund for infrastructure projects, capacity-building, social and cultural revitalization, and job-generating activities on the sub-national level. Its budget through 2023 was approved in September 2018 at \$1.9 billion (North Africa Post, 2018).

In theory, the NIHD should primarily help to actualize development projects designed under the Municipal Charter. Indeed, the NIHD and the Municipal Charter can only be successful if they work in tandem. The NIHD is meant to help fund the participatory development plans embodied in the Charter and finance the projects that local people expressed they most need during participatory planning processes (such as during the fulfillment of the Communal Charter requiring such actions) and want to implement, helping to ensure their sustainability. If this were the case, and if the NIHD's budget were doubled through 2023, then it is my assertion—based on budgetary analyses and project evaluations at municipal levels—that Morocco could potentially fulfill its development model and vision through local community-driven development movements that incorporate multisectoral partnerships at all administrative tiers, rather than remaining ranked 123 among nations on the Human Development Index following an enormity of expenditure, intentions, and effort (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

If the Municipal Charter does not result in projects properly defined over the course of community-wide meetings (inclusive to the general public (Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 72), disadvantaged groups (Kapoor, 2002, p. 104), professionals (Swantz, 1982, pp. 114-115), and the vulnerable (Kumar, 2002, p. 51), which is unfortunately often the case due to inadequate participatory training and finance, then it can be expected that the NIHD will not have adequate local projects to fund and that the aggregate of results fall short of national goals, as is already happening.

There are many other practical NIHD reforms to increase its development impact. First, the provincial administrations of NIHD should accept development proposals all year round. As of now, the shifting periods during the year when they receive proposals mean that opportunities open and close, and most local associations and cooperatives remain unaware.

Second, the NIHD should be maximally flexible to fund the range of projects communities determine most important to them (whether in health, education, construction, etc.). The NIHD's criteria regarding project types they consider supporting also often changes, such as their across the board prohibition in recent years of local community construction projects, while rural community priorities have remained consistent, such as building of preschools, drinking water towers and irrigation canals, and work centers for local cooperatives and associations.

Third, the NIHD should double the amount of the funding ceiling for local projects to \$60,000 to enable construction of irrigation systems, agricultural processing facilities, and other vital infrastructure, as well as reduce the requirement

that recipients contribute toward the financial amount requested to 10% from the current 30%. The requirement to co-invest is understandable because it seeks to encourage buy-in and a deeper level of commitment by the beneficiaries. However, the 30% level has become a prohibitive barrier for many people to access the program, as was expressed by community representatives in the Oujda, Beni Mellal, Marrakech, and other regions.² In-kind giving on the part of community applicants, such as labor and land, should be acceptable by the NIHD in place of the financial contribution. Furthermore, there also appears to be a many month lag between when beneficiaries manage to pay their financial contribution and when NIHD finally disburses the total grant. In Morocco, it is customary for financial transactions related to goods and services to be immediate upon delivery, just as people's needs are immediate. The NIHD ought not be an exception to this norm.

Finally, and most critically, the NIHD should co-create project proposals among its staff with the prospective local beneficiaries. Rural areas' illiteracy rate is nearly double that in urban places at over 40%, and rural women's illiteracy is close to double that of men (Hemidach, 2015). Drafting the required project proposals and documents is impossible for people and communities who could most utilize NIHD. *Credit Agricole*, Morocco's leading bank that finances professionals in agriculture and the agri-food sector, and USAID in northern Iraq are starting to gain experiences in co-creating project proposals with community representatives and beneficiaries,³ lessons from which might be helpful if NIHD adopted this approach. Incorporating these measures and aligning the NIHD and the Municipal Charter regarding participatory planning and development could create a sharp rise in the implementation of new local development projects that are consistent with the necessities of sustainability.

Moroccan Decentralization

The "roadmap" of Moroccan decentralization—derived from a series of public statements of the King of Morocco since 2008—aims to utilize ongoing national level engagement (devolution) along with sub-national partnerships (de-concentration), to help implement community projects (delegation). In other words, the Moroccan pathway aims to rally national resources and partnerships for local development. In principle, this is good for sustainability. However, appropriate and lasting construction of decentralized systems must happen in tandem with the implementation of community planning, projects, and partnership-building between the public, private, and civil sectors (Friedmann & Klauss et. al., 1984, pp. 189-194). These relationships and joint development actions are what decentralized systems are actually made of, and this requires sustained community initiatives on a widespread basis. Therefore, without the Municipal Charter and the NIHD working together, adequate decentralized arrangements of public administrations will neither be effectively formed nor adequately enduring.

² Yossef Ben-Meir, based on meetings with community representatives in the regions of Oujda, Marrakech, Beni Mellal, and others during 2018-19.

³ Ali Benmokhtar (Credit Agricole, Marrakech) and Timothy Lavelle (USAID, Washington, DC), based on meetings with Yossef Ben-Meir in 2018.

Morocco's decentralization has been referred to as "regionalization," meaning that its emphasis is on the devolution of power to its 12 regions (Pignon & Braconnier, 2017). Nevertheless, regional public administrative centers in Morocco remain too distant from the dispersed communities of their jurisdictions. This causes considerable delays of basic authorizations needed to carry development initiatives forward. Even provincialization, which is the breakdown of regions into their provinces, resembles an unnecessary limitation on reasonable actions for sustainable change and growth.

In Morocco overall, decentralization has not significantly taken hold, which only further suppresses new local development. The national level still generally decides the parameters, terms, cases, and situations for sub-regional actions, as I have observed generally across all ministries that engage in sustainable human development as part of their mission. For example, local education directors defer decisions about opening beds in a middle school dormitory. During the fall of 2018, the King of Morocco tasked the government to submit a draft Decentralization Charter, which has now been developed and would ideally bind national and regional government agencies to specific functions for the administration of human services (ElJechtimi, 2018). The human development course of the nation depends upon clear articulation and implementation among the relationships between public, civil, and private institutions.

Without hardly a mention of the municipal level, the Decentralization Charter will likely fall short of enabling the system of sub-national management of development to fulfill its promise for Moroccan local communities. The elements of the Municipal Charter, particularly the community creation of participatory development plans, should clearly be referenced in the Decentralization Charter, as well as the central elements of the Decentralization Roadmap being de-concentration (intersectoral subnational partnerships) and delegation (community management). Devolution (ongoing national level engagement) is already well codified in the Decentralization Charter, whose function appears to be that of establishing parameters for the national and regional levels to interface, without establishing the necessary roles of the provinces and municipalities with the nation's decentralization system.

Decentralization advances autonomy of societies to determine their own development path (Parfitt, 2004, pp. 538-539). Brazilian economist Theotonio Dos Santos stated that for developing nations to no longer be dependent on foreign trade and be able to build a locally controlled economy, they must restructure internally and direct their development efforts and resources toward the interior, which decentralization can help to do (Dos Santos, 1978, pp. 57-80). For Dos Santos (1978), internal conditions determine the potential effects of the international situation (pp. 57-80). Therefore, he suggests that underdeveloped economies develop their own productive autonomy. Decentralization by its very nature promotes the growth of alternative centers in what were previously areas of the periphery. A certain amount of autonomy from political, administration, and economic national centers and from global dynamics is thus created (Rolly, 2001, p. 55). Decentralization then becomes a potential means of conflict resolution by

providing autonomy to sub-regions, which can have a stabilizing effect (Hulbe, 1980, p. 56).

Here again, informational workshop sessions on decentralized organization and its bottom-up formation are necessary with national, regional, and local leaders. Conducting workshops that help demonstrate overlapping parallels between localized control over social affairs and Islamic religious concepts would also be helpful and is sorely needed today. For some national leaders, particularly Islamists, this could heighten decentralization's appeal by placing it in this cultural-traditional context, where it can be naturally integrated. For example, some writers on Islamic political philosophy describe the notions of *shura*, *ummah*, *baya*, and *tawhidi* as involving dimensions of local governance, social justice, leadership, and personal empowerment (Said, Abu-Nimer, & Sharify-Funk, 2006, pp. 159-162). By developing understanding as to how Islamic precepts relate to characteristics of participatory decentralization, supportive coalitions can be expanded by having more shared frames of references for furthering sustainable development. By further developing this understanding as to how specifically Islamic ideas exist in participatory and decentralized pathways, development advocates are able to expand the community of the people and groups with whom there may be regularly dialogue and partnership, with more closely aligned and relatable frames of references.

There are concerns that the process of decentralization in pursuing development may lead to destabilizing political outcomes (Rolly, 2001, p. 56). With regards to Morocco, the emphasis on participatory approaches by local communities to create these projects centers around their livelihoods and meeting their immediate human needs. Having directly or indirectly helped bring about local meetings and projects in all its 12 regions, I have observed no basis for concerns that stem beyond these developmental factors involving the unrealized plethora of socioeconomic and environmental opportunities of the people. Communities are focused on meeting their needs; creating and furthering their associations and cooperatives toward their goals; and somehow addressing what can seem stifling difficulties for progress. There has certainly been ample opportunity to redress the needless poverty, and there still is if only Moroccan leadership were to fulfill the model of decentralized participatory development to which it is committed.

However, human service ministries' consistent deference to Rabat remains as fixed as ever. Reflecting upon dozens of meetings regarding community development projects in an array of sectors since 2008 when the Decentralization Roadmap was launched, my experience begs the question: What compels regional directors of public agencies that oversee the different human service deliveries over vast areas to still refer to central administrations for their approval of modest-sized initiatives and partnership agreements? Is it that they actually do not understand their full authority or that it has not been specifically enough defined, or is it that the pattern of centralized behavior is so deeply entrenched that regional managers are not as of yet comfortable or confident to execute the power that they have? Even as these possible explanations are ultimately conjecture within an ongoing decentralization process, it may be a combination of these and other factors that keep decentralization an intention rather than a reality.

Understandably, executing decentralization, particularly at an accelerated pace, can be a delicate balance. The local level is stratified socio-economically, environmentally, and in regards to gender just as it is on the societal level and globally (Brohman et al., 1996, p. 235). Advancing decentralization quickly can be fraught with unhelpful consequences, such as entrenching further the locally affluent and political classes (Heller, 2000, p. 139). However, genuine implementation of frameworks one and two could create the initial participatory and sustainability conditions that would enable Morocco to eventually opt for an emerging form of decentralized development management to the municipal level. In order for this to unfold, local communities and their associations require greater guidance, support and practice in managing projects (that incorporate multi-sectoral partnerships) through their different phases, and to also directly experience their development benefits.

Moroccan Agriculture and Rural Development

The fourth framework, which is constituted by Morocco's agricultural development programs to promote product cultivation, processing, and commercializing, are not making a sufficient difference for the majority of farming families who cultivate five hectares or less of land and who experience intractable poverty (Maroc Vert, 2019). The social unrest in northern Morocco is a direct reflection of the ongoing rural poverty and a fallout in the application of the country's agricultural, human development, and participatory frameworks. Rural poverty—despite immense local and national potential—is the “Achilles’ heel” of Morocco's stability and, ultimately, national prosperity.

Local people are left deeply frustrated with the anemic progress made over the past three decades in implementing rural development projects they prioritize—a period that has seen rural poverty increase most dramatically in the 1990s (Levy, 2005) and is currently three times higher than urban poverty (Ghanem, 2015). I would suggest that the rural poverty conditions in Morocco are increasingly impossible to justify. Even with viable projects aplenty, donors and financiers complain of a lack of viable business and development proposals. But how could that be when, for example, farming communities know exactly the irrigation infrastructure that is needed to uplift all village households? Local people consistently prioritize this, yet even when the local beneficiaries would gladly contribute their labor in-kind, there has been no construction. Irrigation infrastructure projects are prohibitively expensive, especially in mountain areas, and hardly any other project will more greatly improve agricultural production, food security, and income.

Rural development conditions are very problematic; there are the near complete losses of local fruit tree varieties of fig, apple, pear, grape, clementine, carob, date, and others that are endemic to the northern region, and other varieties elsewhere in Morocco. These local crop varieties are encouraged in Morocco's “Green” plan for agriculture. The crops offer a genetic resource for small farmers that enhances food security in the face of water scarcity and climate change. However, agrobiodiversity remains seriously undermined because of a few high-yielding varieties that cause

genetic erosion; in addition, there is the backing of government programs that currently deem agriculture for export of greater national importance (Ouarghidi, 2018).

This is occurring in Morocco at a time when billions of trees and plants are needed (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Rural Development and Waters and Forests, 2013). Farming families are also compelled by the market and population to transition away from growing the traditional staples of barley and corn. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, these staples are grown on 70% of agricultural land, yet account for only 10-15% of agricultural revenue (King Mohammed VI, 2008). Government tree nurseries have been closing over the years when they should be at maximum production capacities based on the enormous public demand for trees. One simple policy shift would make a profound difference for tens of thousands of farming families—fig and potentially walnut trees (depending on water availability) should be allowed to be planted at high elevations on public domain lands, just as carob is allowed on public domain lands in lower lying ones.

One of the intolerable consequences of rural poverty is the horrendous drop in participation in education of rural girls, particularly between primary to secondary schools, which is three times higher than urban girls and 15% higher than rural boys (Benyakhlef, 2017). In addition to gender role expectations, such as domestic work, marrying early, and fear of ostracization, other contributing factors of lower female participation are insufficient dormitories, affordable transportation, and adequate decentralization (Auletto, 2017). Many rural families must choose between sending their daughters to fetch drinking water miles away or sending them to school. Available safe drinking water improves girls' education outcomes more than boys (Khandkur, Lavy, & Filmer, 1994).

Agricultural programs understandably put pressure on the entire upstream value chain, from nurseries to markets, of raw and processed product. Enormous value is lost by Moroccan family farmers due to tree and seed dependency, irrigation inefficiency limiting the size of arable lands, ineffectual or nonexistent cooperatives, and by selling their raw product through traditional local market channels. These conditions characterize the experience of the vast majority of farming families, who are without the production capacity, partnerships, and means to add value and reach a consistent standard and quality of product necessary to enter more rewarding markets. These stifling barriers ensure that up to five times the average household income is lost as compared to if a viable cultivation, production, and management system were in place, based on my conservative calculation. Thus, rural people's potential savings, income, and revenue for reinvestment—their basis for growth—only serve to improve livelihoods elsewhere while they themselves reap no benefit.

Agricultural finance programs have to make choices as to where they can catalyze the greatest possible developmental difference with their limited resources. In this regard, project priority solutions are widely shared and are in irrigation: water canals, basins, towers, pipes, pumps, infrastructure—all of which can conserve water by 50% or more and create the opportunity to expand agricultural cultivation. Meeting the equally-widespread need for clean drinking water could be

appropriately incorporated into the technical scheme. Only approximately 60% of rural Moroccans have access to clean drinking water. Though this has increased from 14% in 1995, access to house connections and good water sources has improved only slightly (Benargane, , 2017). Clean drinking water projects remain a top priority expressed by rural communities. Too often, there seems to be a disconnect, as in this case, between the national human development figures that show marked improvements, and the reality of rural communities that have been left behind.

The obvious counter-response to the recommendation regarding irrigation is that there are already government programs to subsidize some of these activities for farmers (pressure drip systems, for example). However, those programs need to be brought to the farmers where they are, and the needed partnerships and local institutional growth are aided by facilitating farmers' strategic planning, outreach, and experiential learning. Programs should fund nurseries on public land lent to community associations to reduce risk and cost to farmers, similar to what the Moroccan High Commission of Waters and Forests, public schools, universities, and others have done with the High Atlas Foundation (HAF), the U.S.-Moroccan nonprofit organization I founded and help lead that works to strengthen cooperative capacity-building in management and technical areas, organic, food safety, and other certifications, and revolving lines of credit in order for cooperatives to acquire certified product for its processing and sale. The results of these combined actions, as HAF has observed in rural cases in Morocco, will be a surge in cultivation and market-ready product, along with improved local organization, reinvestment in human development, and decentralized partnerships that conduct decision-making considerate of such multiple factors. The HAF model can be adopted and adapted by other community-based organizations.

For example, the Moroccan Jewish community is also participating in the national agricultural development effort by providing land in-kind to cooperatives and associations (with HAF guidance and support) in order for rural communities to build their needed tree nurseries, and most recently in the Province of Ourzazate with government funding to help build the irrigation infrastructure and assist intercultural collaboration. The 300 or so agricultural extension centers and the 54 training schools in Morocco under the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forest should be fitted for endemic and organic fruit tree and medicinal plant nurseries. In this way, these locations will be natural extension technical skills transference sites for the surrounding areas, essential in order for Moroccan communities to generate the one billion agro-forestry trees the nation requires (Ben-Meir, 2015). Their students and staff should be the future trainers who are themselves trained experientially in facilitating participatory planning and development projects with local communities.

But how do we get there? Again, the first framework of the Municipal Charter, forming community development plans driven by the intended beneficiaries, women and men of all ages, is key for sustainable agricultural project identification and implementation. Facilitation of project development is helpful and needed; in this regard, establishing centers of participatory planning to assist with dialogue,

meeting space, and coordination will be vital. Provincial governors and other local leaders who understand the important contribution such centers can make should exercise greater authority to assign underutilized public or civil building infrastructure for this participatory development purpose.

Moudawana and Women's Empowerment

The fifth framework, Moudawana—Morocco's family code—represents a major opportunity for equality and prosperity for women. Like the deficiencies in positive outcomes from the other frameworks relative to opportunity, the ground-level application of Moudawana's articles—which are of a rights-based approach to sustainable development—have not broadly translated into positive change for the vast majority of rural women. In an action-research study conducted by the High Atlas Foundation, 94% of 194 participating women in the rural Al Haouz province said that they had never heard of Moudawana. The purpose of the study was to assist the High Atlas Foundation in the delivery of workshops that involve 1) recognizing and exercising rights, 2) growing capacities for participatory cooperative development, and 3) building the knowledge and facilitative skills of citizens in empowerment processes.

The lead researcher, Gal Kramarski (2018), stated in her yet unpublished results, "All groups mentioned illiteracy as a core obstacle that holds them back from knowing their rights" (p. 15). The distances between communities and their closest middle and high schools create practical (infrastructural) and cultural barriers for participation in education by rural girls. Without cell phone coverage and independence, one person expressed the sentiment: "No one cares about us, we are neglected here; how could we know our rights?" Kramarski (2018) observed, "Many women indicated that they are dependent on their relatives; their lack of financial and social freedom prevents their access to rights" (pp. 17-18).

The observations from the fore mentioned study, and the ongoing empowerment program it launched, point to a multidimensional course to advance the status and opportunities of Moroccan women. First, 10 urban women from universities in Marrakesh who were part of the above study, and all of whom had awareness about Moudawana as an issue of political and civil struggle recognize the opportunity to strengthen the capacities of both rural and university women in Morocco by facilitating women's workshops that teach integrated self-discovery, Moudawana rights, and cooperative development programs. Such exchanges have many reciprocal advantages.

Second, in order to expand empowerment experiences and development, it would be helpful to have the theoretical and methodological perspectives of Western and Islamic feminisms analyzed together for similarities and differences. Their integration could create enhanced approaches and outcomes toward greater participation, potentially benefiting both societies (or civilizations).

Third, self-discovery, human rights-based, and confidence-building strategies can then also achieve greater financial independence for women through cooperatives, further human development, management and technical capacities, and social networks. Just as participatory planning needs to result in measurable improvements in people's lives to be successful, so too should the women's

empowerment processes result in more sustainable development. For example, Gal Kamarski's (2018a) published report indicates that the initial self-discovery workshops, utilizing participatory democratic procedures, helped women to identify economic solutions for development. A group of 35 Moroccan women in the Marrakesh region addressed illiteracy by hiring a female university student and starting a literacy program in their village, and 65% of participants have joined parent associations and are actively involved in efforts to improve local schools for their children's benefit.

Finally, education alone is not enough to increase women's employment, as evidenced by the fact that in Morocco, women already comprise 47% of the population holding a tertiary degree of some kind, and yet the vast majority remain marginalized from the workforce ("Ratio of female to male tertiary enrollment," *World Bank World Development Indicators Database*, 2010). Education programs must be combined with empowerment workshops to give women the confidence they need to overcome patriarchal notions preventing them from entering the workforce. Women, as community leaders, also must be involved in identifying and implementing development projects. Only with women's close involvement will such projects truly be successful at the local community level and beyond.

Youth, Activism, and Development

The sixth framework—the advancement of youth enterprises and their civil and political participation in decision-making—is full of opportunities and challenges in Morocco. There are many avenues to engage youth in community-based volunteerism and internship experiences for human development. It comes down to investment, leadership, and implementation management. University-based action research and service learning, youth centers, and schools show every day how they can be the catalysts for people's projects and social change, while forging students' best possible futures through formative skill-building. However, lack of funding makes it hard to maintain these programs, which actually form the basis to redress the 40% urban youth unemployment and extenuate innovative social development (Reddy, 2017). In the long term, these programs, which are not very expensive, pay for themselves, especially when considering the hope and sense of purpose these experiences give young people and the development results that youth subsequently create in their communities.

Capacity-building programs for groups of young people—such as in education and youth center settings, with urban students assisting local communities, and children protection centers—should couple two streams of mutually reinforcing actions. First, the application of participatory methods among the youth training participants, so that they themselves analyze and strategize to achieve their self-defined needs. Simultaneously, they learn the participatory approach. Second, as they learn planning methods from their own use of them, the students apply the techniques with neighboring communities to affect change beyond their own schools, centers, or neighborhoods. In this way, student and community projects are identified and implemented as skills in participatory planning and project management are built among the youth participants. Learning-by-doing is cost

effective, but it requires management and integrated programs involving participant reflection, writing, collaborative learning, and critical thinking.

Conclusion—Morocco: Setting the Table for Sustainable Prosperity

The Moroccan frameworks for development enumerate what is needed to catalyze sustainable development of marginalized areas and groups, and a few instructive cases have proven capable of bringing ideas to full implementation with replicable and enduring results. These successful cases underscore the importance of participatory approaches for defining and implementing sustainable initiatives. They encourage decentralization in order to enable local communities and civil and public agencies to make decisions and allocate resources for people's projects. The frameworks target rural communities, women, and youth in recognition of their disadvantaged situations, and their role as key drivers of transformational change.

Taken together, these frameworks provide the needed comprehensive pathways for the people of Morocco to achieve the future they want, providing a course and means to help reach their human development goals. The Municipal Charter could provide the plans for project development and sustainability that the National Initiative for Human Development could then get behind and help accomplish. Decentralized arrangements are subsequently built and enhanced through community project implementation that involves multi-sectoral partnership.

Moroccan agriculture and agroforestry, with its income-generating and environmental-enhancing potential can and should be the engine for self-reliant financing of the people's projects, especially in rural areas that need it the most. Agriculture projects also become identified and determined through the process of implementing the mandates of the Municipal Charter potentially providing jobs for university trained project facilitators. The Moudawana embodies a rights-based approach and recognizes the centrality of sustainable development as a product of human rights. Thus, it not only secures and protects the just and rightful status of women and girls but also enables a vital pathway toward independence in regard to economic decision-making and empowerment. For youth, increased programs to promote experiential learning, the creation of capacity-building community projects, and the building of employable skills improve both urban and rural livelihoods.

To highlight and reiterate, implementation priorities must include:

1. Provide community development training/workshops;
2. Create Centers for Participatory Rural Project training, planning, and implementation;
3. Empower greater decentralized local control in identifying and implementing development projects;
4. Provide more irrigation infrastructure;
5. Provide greater support for agroforestry, especially for indigenous plants that strengthen biodiversity;
6. Involve and empower women to take active roles in development project planning and implementation; and

7. Involve and empower youth especially through schools and self-study experiential learning programs to take active roles in development project planning and implementation.

Sustainable development depends on people's participation. The first steps to improving community development in Morocco have been taken and rest within the existing frameworks themselves. Communities now need to learn and apply these frameworks in their daily lives by gathering, assessing, implementing, and doing. I have found that all that is needed is to give men and women of all ages the chance to come together through community workshops. If successful, implementing these frameworks will ultimately deliver projects that they and their families have hoped for too long. Thus, empowered rural communities will transform Morocco into a model for sustainable development.

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